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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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21 May 1967

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Information as of 1600
21 May 1967

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HIGHLIGHTS

Heavy Communist resistance continues to the major US Marine/ARVN offensive in the southern DMZ/northeastern Quang Tri Province area. Twelve US aircraft were lost in air action over North Vietnam this weekend.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Heavy fighting was reported throughout South Vietnam during the past weekend and was highlighted by intensified Communist resistance to the major US Marine/ARVN offensive against NVA positions in the southern DMZ/northeastern Quang Tri Province area (Paras. 1-9).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

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The Constituent Assembly has set 17 December as the date for upper house elections (Para. 4-5). A leadership struggle among the Hoa Hao has apparently been resolved, and may result in unified Hoa Hao support for Premier Ky's presidential candidacy (Paras. 6-7).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

Twelve US aircraft were lost in air action over North Vietnam this weekend; confirmed DRV MIG fighter losses totaled ten (Para. 1). For the first time in the air war against North Vietnam, US Navy aircraft on 19 and 21 May struck the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant, located approximately one mile north of the city's center (Paras. 2-3). Several other major targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area were also attacked by US

aircraft during the weekend (Para. 4).

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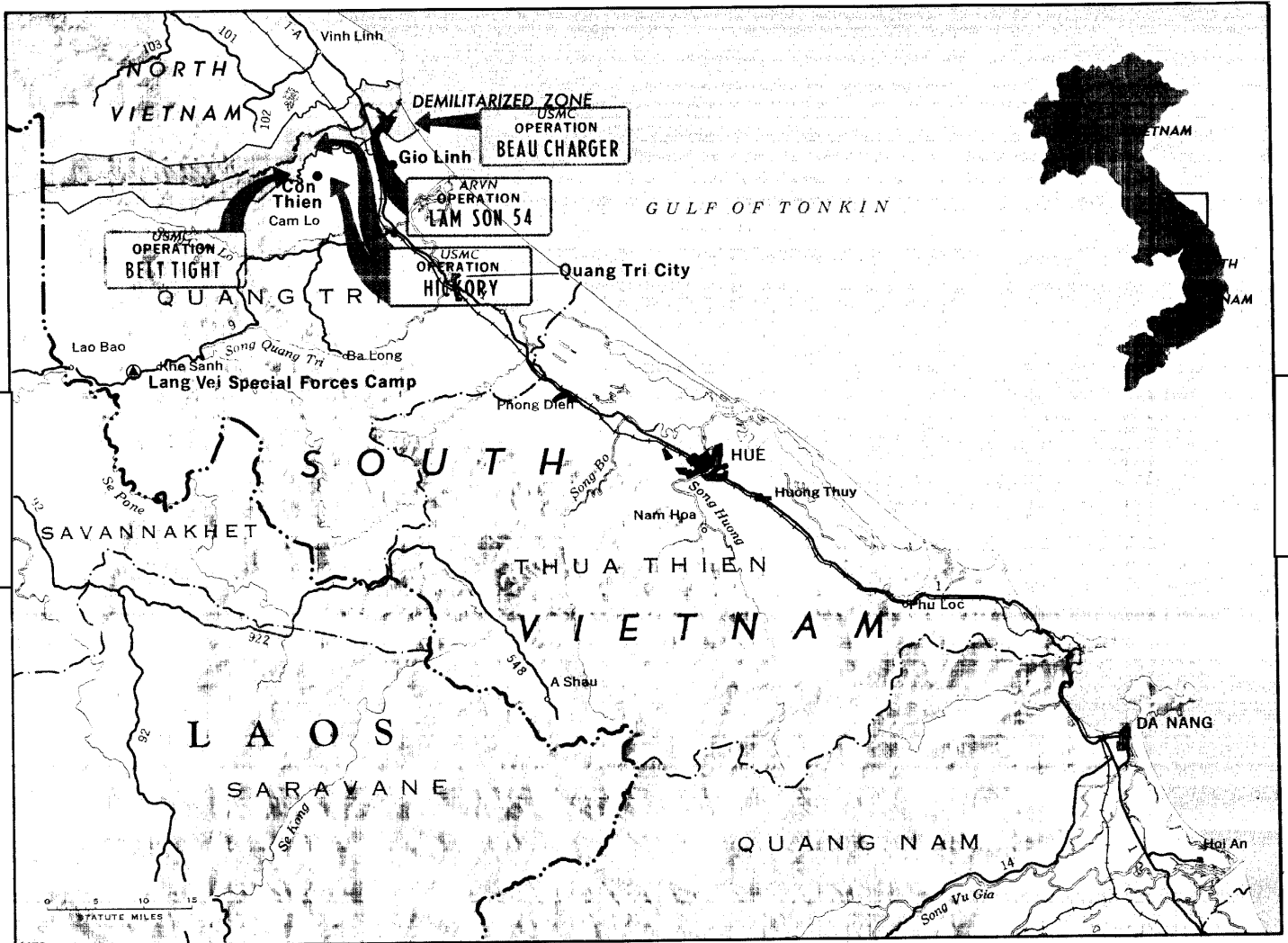
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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The major allied drive against North Vietnamese Army (NVA) positions in the southern portion of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and adjacent areas of northeastern Quang Tri Province continued to gather momentum this weekend, amid reports of heavy ground fighting throughout the four corps areas of South Vietnam.

The DMZ/Northern Quang Tri Province Offensive

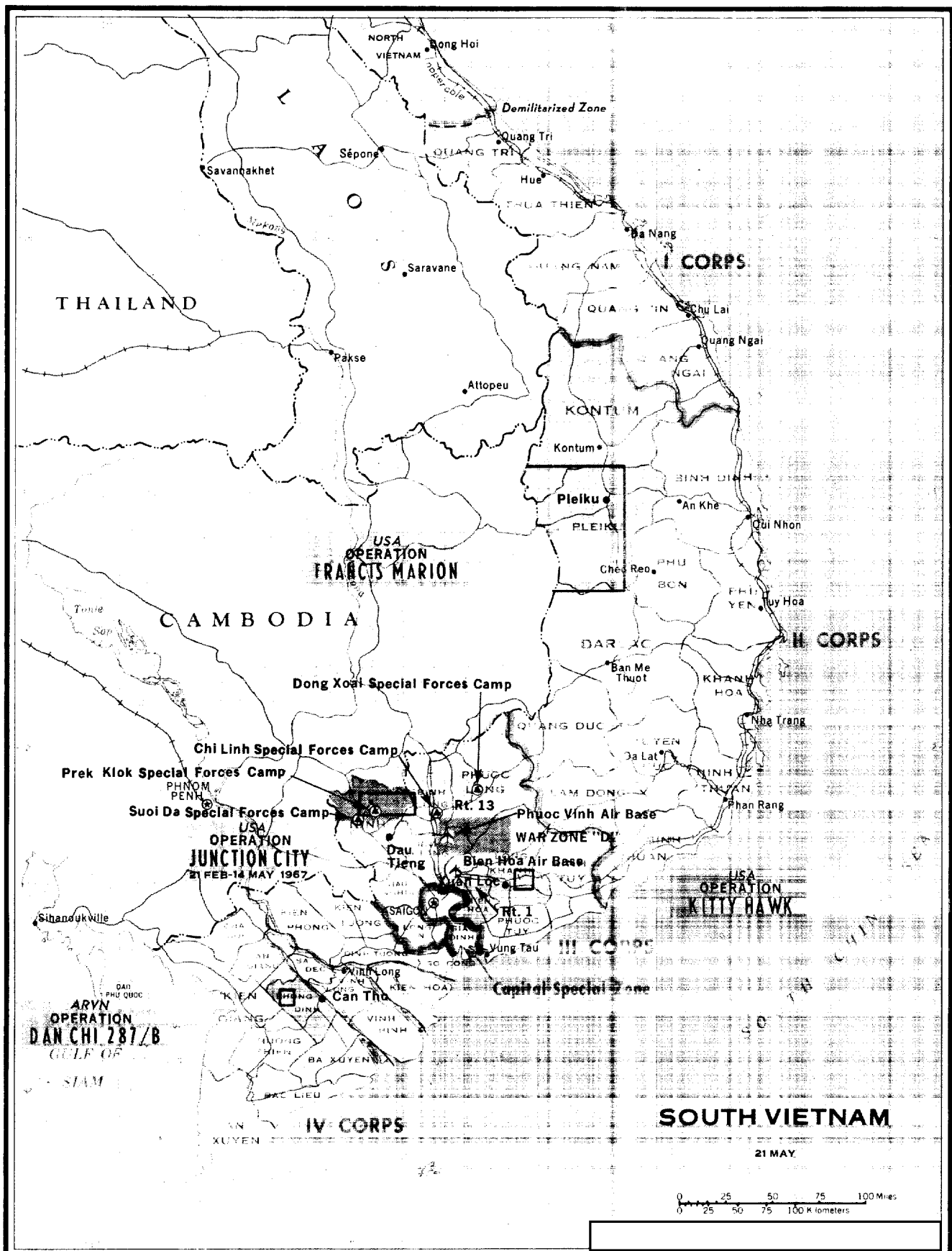
2. A total of eight US Marine and six ARVN battalions have now been committed to the four major ground offensives currently under way in the DMZ/northern Quang Tri tactical area of operations. Elements of six Marine battalions participating in Operation HICKORY encountered heavy enemy resistance on 20-21 May as they continued their assault on the DMZ from approach routes north of Con Thien. As of 21 May, this phase of the four-pronged DMZ drive had resulted in 135 NVA killed as against US losses of 37 killed and 400 wounded. In addition, HICKORY forces operating within the DMZ located nearly ten tons of assorted ammunition and explosives about a half-mile south of the Ben Hai River.

3. Meanwhile, to the east of Operation HICKORY, six ARVN battalions³ conducting Operation LAM SON 54 also encountered determined resistance from battalion-sized or larger NVA units as they continued their sweep southward from the Ben Hai River toward the Quang Tri Province boundary. As of 21 May, the South Vietnamese claimed to have killed 340 Communist troops while losing 24 killed and 115 wounded.

4. In the two remaining DMZ operations--BEAU CHARGER and BELT TIGHT--the two participating US Marine special battalion landing teams reported little significant enemy contact during the weekend. BEAU CHARGER, which began on 17 May with an amphibious assault on the eastern shores of the DMZ in support of ARVN Operation LAM SON 54, has thus far reported enemy

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losses of 79 killed and US losses of 23 killed and 75 wounded. BELT TIGHT, which began on 19 May with a heliborne assault in the DMZ in support of Operation HICKORY, has reported no enemy contact to date.

Action Elsewhere in Quang Tri Province

5. In the central coastal portion of Quang Tri Province, heavy fighting erupted on 19-20 May between two battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment and an estimated NVA battalion some five miles east of Quang Tri city. In the 14-hour engagement that ensued, 152 Communist troops were killed and 76 weapons captured, as against government losses of 49 killed (2 US), 96 wounded, and 26 missing. While the enemy unit in contact has not been firmly identified, its subordination to either the Communist DMZ Front or Northern Front command is probable.

6. In western Quang Tri Province near the Laotian border, the South Vietnamese CIDG Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei was shelled by a heavy volume of 82-mm. mortar fire on 21 May. An estimated 15 rounds landed within the troop compound area, resulting in friendly casualties of three killed and 16 wounded (4 US). A subsequent ground penetration probe by an enemy force of undetermined strength failed to breach the camp's defensive positions. The attack may have been launched by elements of the 325th NVA Division which is known to have participated in the recent heavy fighting at nearby Khe Sanh.

II Corps

7. In the western highlands, three companies of US 4th Infantry Division (Operation FRANCIS MARION) in night defensive positions some 21 miles southwest of Pleiku city were shelled by nearly 225 rounds of rocket and mortar fire on 20 May. A subsequent three-hour enemy ground attack against the perimeter of one of the companies was beaten off by supporting AC-47 aircraft and artillery. According to preliminary after-action reports, 17 US troops were killed and 66 wounded, while Communist losses totaled 18 killed. This engagement appears to be another in a series

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of recent indicators suggesting that elements of the five-regiment NVA "B-3 Front" Western Highland military command may be about to commence major operations against allied forces and static defensive positions in the Pleiku/Kontum/Cambodia triborder area.

III Corps

8. Elements of the US 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment conducting Operation KITTY HAWK in Long Khanh Province prematurely triggered an estimated battalion-size Viet Cong ambush along Route 1 near Xuan Loc on 21 May. The ambush had apparently been set up to strike a large ARVN convoy which was scheduled to traverse Route 1 later in the day. The action resulted in enemy losses of 20 killed and US losses of 18 killed and 32 wounded.

IV Corps

9. In the Mekong Delta province of Phong Dinh, seven battalions of the 21st ARVN Division established heavy contact with Viet Cong forces on 20-21 May during the conduct of search-and-destroy Operation DAN CHI 287/B some 16 miles west of Can Tho. Ninety-eight enemy troops were reported killed, against ARVN losses of eight killed and 21 wounded.

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Assembly Begins Debate of Senate Electoral Law

4. In its sessions of 19 and 20 May, the Constituent Assembly decided on certain basic principles of the upper house electoral law. The assembly chose 17 December as the date for the senate elections and decided that the upper house shall consist of 60 men, composed of the six ten-man slates receiving the most votes nationwide. Each voter will only be allowed to express preference for one list. Other guidelines established by the assembly pertained to financial aspects of the campaign, including deposits by each slate entering the race and campaign costs to be carried by the government. An article by article debate of the law will begin on 25 May, following a four-day recess commemorating Buddha's birthday.

5. The debate on the election date was lengthy, but no bloc or group appeared to feel strongly on the subject. There was no apparent preference on the part of progovernment or opposition deputies. When ratifying the constitution in late March, the ruling Directorate and Armed Forces Congress declared that the senate election would be held on the same day as the presidential election in early September, with the lower house election being held in early October. By attempting to delay the date for legislative elections, the assembly may be trying to prolong its own life. The constitution stipulates that once the president assumes office, the assembly will assume full legislative powers until the elected legislature is convened. The assembly has not yet set a date for lower house elections, but it presumably will be some time after 17 December.

Hoa Hao Leadership Struggle Apparently Resolved

6. The dispute between Lt. Colonel Tran Van Tuoi and Luong Trung Tuong over the leadership of the Hoa Hao central executive committee has apparently been resolved. According to an agreement reached on 18 May, executive committee authority will be transferred to a temporary secretariat to be headed by Lt. Colonel Tuoi, with Luong Trung

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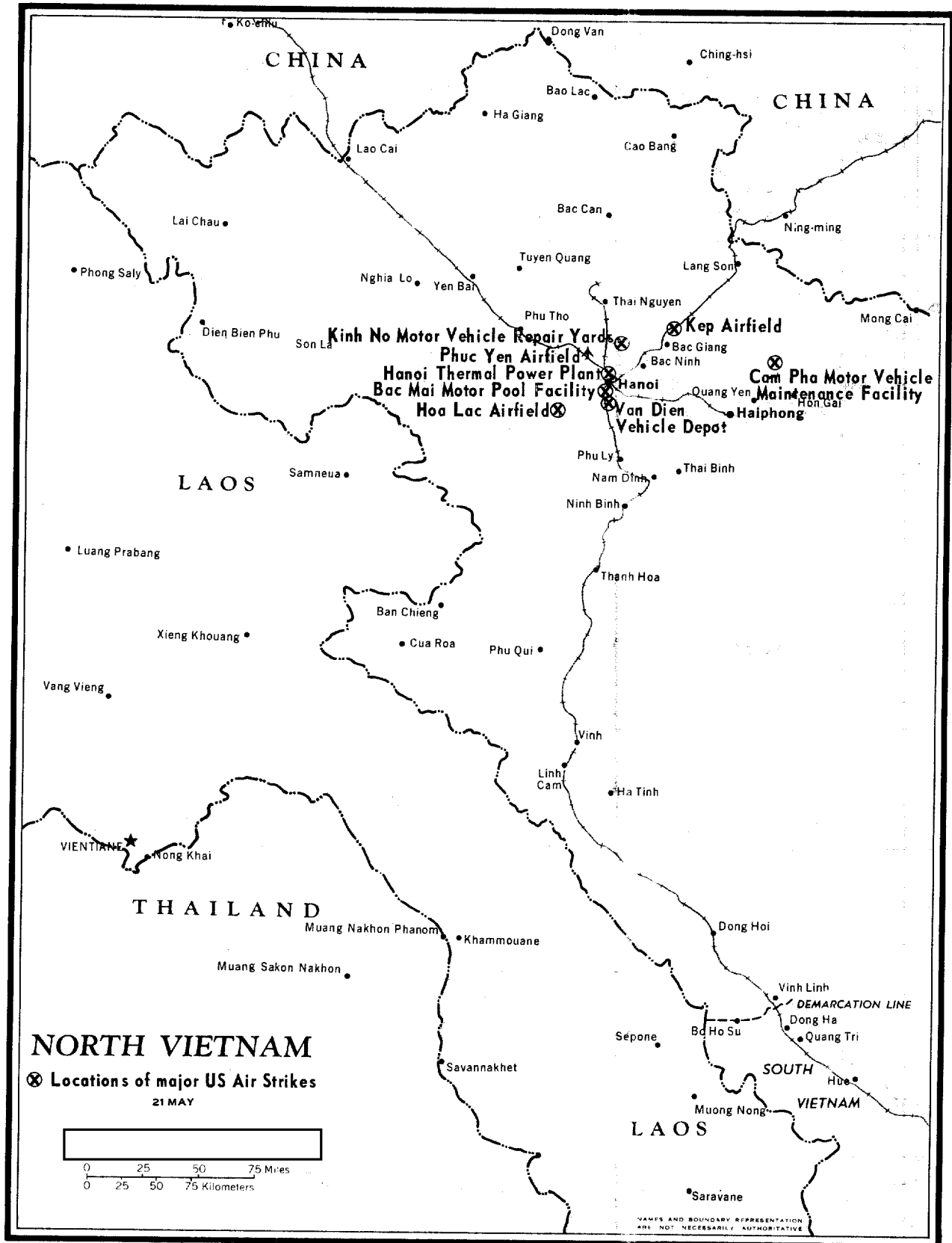
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Tuong as an adviser. A meeting of all Hoa Hao provincial representatives is scheduled for 24 May, presumably to set the seal on this agreement.

7. Premier Ky was present in An Giang Province when the bargain between the two Hoa Hao leaders was made on 18 May. Ky reportedly agreed to grant Tuoi the four month leave of absence from the army necessary for Tuoi to chair the new Hoa Hao secretariat. Because of Ky's help, US Embassy officials believe that Tuoi will most probably support Ky's presidential candidacy, and that the chances of Ky gaining unified Hoa Hao support have been considerably enhanced.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Twelve US strike aircraft were lost in air action over North Vietnam during the past weekend. Of these losses, four were attributed to conventional AAA ground fire, one to a SAM, one to a MIG-17, and the others to unknown causes. Confirmed North Vietnamese air losses during this period included seven MIG-17s and three MIG-21s.

2. US Navy aircraft from the carrier USS Bon Homme Richard on 19 and 21 May executed the first air strikes against the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant, located approximately 1.1 miles north of the city's center.

[REDACTED] Preliminary pilot reports indicated heavy damage to the plant's generator hall and boiler house with no collateral damage in nearby populated areas. At least 40 airborne SAMs were encountered by US strike pilots, in addition to heavy AAA fire. Three US aircraft supporting the A-4E strike force in its initial attack against the plant on 19 May were downed due to unknown causes. A fourth US support aircraft flying a flak-suppression mission for the 21 May strike was also lost.

3. Prior to this weekend's strikes, the thermal power plant had the capability of providing 17 percent of the total electric power output of North Vietnam. In addition, it served as the major energy source for the Hanoi area, including its military installations and industries, and provided supplemental power to the Haiphong area.

4. Other major US air targets struck in the Hanoi/Haiphong area this weekend included the Van Dien vehicle depot (six miles south of Hanoi), the Kinh No motor vehicle repair yards (nine miles north of Hanoi), the Bac Mai motor pool facility (one and one-half miles south of Hanoi), and the Cam Pha motor vehicle maintenance facility (40 miles northeast of Haiphong). In addition, restrikes were again conducted against both Kep and Hoa Lac airfields, and the Haiphong Thermal Power Plant Unit.

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